

WORKERS WORLD

Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!

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What can stop layoffs? Organize to fight back now

By Fred Goldstein

On becoming president, Barack Obama proclaimed his job creation goal to be 3 million jobs over the next two years. Yet in the last two months alone nearly 1.2 million jobs have been lost: 577,000 in December and 598,000 in January. The December figure was revised upward by the government, which had originally estimated it at 533,000. Economists expect the monthly number to be even worse in February.

With each new layoff announcement, the target number for jobs to be created goes up. The latest target is 4 million, even though right-wing Republicans are whitening down the stimulus package.

The official unemployment number has jumped from 7.2 percent to 7.6 percent. But this is not the total unemployment number, which includes those who have stopped looking for work and those working part time because they cannot find full-time work. That has jumped from 13.5 percent to 13.9 percent.

In effect, this means that to achieve full employment for the approximately 154 million people in the workforce, some 21.4 million new full-time jobs would be needed now—and this number is growing rapidly each month.

Every worker should do the math. The so-called stimulus package, even assuming that it could meet its goals, appears more and more anemic compared to the momentum of the crisis, which is growing each week, each month. Creating relatively few jobs at a snail's pace leaves tens of millions of workers unemployed and underemployed. Tens of millions more are vulnerable to becoming part of the unemployment statistics.

Every new grim announcement by the government on unemployment, foreclosures, evictions, homelessness, the loss of health care, hunger, record numbers applying to hard-pressed food banks, an increase in child poverty, etc., should become a big wake-up call for the multinational working class to get organized for a fightback.

Actions being planned

One important attempt to begin the crucial fightback is taking place in New York City where the Bail Out the

People Movement is forging a grassroots alliance for struggle and calling a national action against the bankers on Wall Street on April 3 and 4. While the mobilization is targeting the bankers, it has a broad program with a focus on stopping the layoffs. Hundreds of endorsers and contingents are coming aboard from every region of the country.

Along the same line, a network of local coalitions in cities around the country, from New York to Boston to Los Angeles, is organizing to make May Day 2009 a day of struggle and unity to fight back against attacks on immigrant workers and to strengthen the struggle against the economic crisis. Many of these coalitions played key roles in the great May Day 2006 strike/boycott of millions of immigrant workers.

At this moment a delegation representing 250 workers, most of them immigrants, who sat in at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago is touring the country. These workers occupied the plant for five days until they won their severance pay and back pay. They are telling their inspiring story to standing-room-only gatherings of trade unionists and activists. The workers are from the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers, Local 1110. The tour is sponsored by Jobs with Justice.

The boldness of Local 1110 inspired the solidarity of the labor movement and the political movement. These workers set a living example of reviving a tactic—the sit-down strike—that was used in the 1930s on a massive scale to win the greatest victories in U.S. labor history.

Local 1110 carried out its sit-down strike in Chicago in the midst of a growing economic crisis. But these workers are not unique. All over the country there are rank-and-file workers, lower-level union officials, shop stewards and trade union activists at all levels, as well as sympathizers with the labor movement, looking for a way to fight back.

Vast network of potential power

There are now 16 million workers in the organized labor movement. There are tens of thousands of local unions around the country, thousands of them under

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Employee Free Choice Act Why workers need it

By Cheryl LaBash

On Feb. 4, thousands of workers delivered boxes of signed cards supporting the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) to Congress in Washington, D.C. The cards represent more than 1.5 million signers from every U.S. state. On Feb. 5, workers in California marched 10 miles in the rain from downtown Los Angeles to the Westwood Federal Building dramatically demanding passage of the EFCA.

Meanwhile, corporations, banks and business associations like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are heavily financing public relations and lobbying campaigns to defeat it. The U.S. Senate "millionaires' club" has even balked at confirming Hilda Solis, President Barack Obama's nominee for Secretary of Labor, because Solis supports the EFCA.

What is the Employee Free Choice Act?

EFCA legislation proposes to block bosses who try to stop or delay union certification through intimidation, threats or firing pro-union workers. Under the EFCA when a majority of workers sign cards and choose direct union certification instead of an election, the bosses will be required to begin negotiations for the initial contract. Binding arbitration can be used to reach two-year contracts if those negotiations fail. For the first time, penalties including triple back pay and fines can be levied against the bosses for "unfair labor practices."

Both union federations, Change to Win and the

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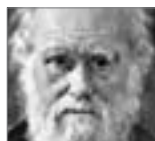
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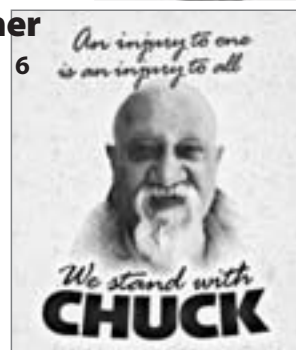


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Detail from contemporary Zimbabwe sculpture

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Michigan sheriff points the way Enforce bailout bills, relieve homeowners

By Jerry Goldberg

The Treasury Secretary will soon announce plans for the federal government to essentially take over the failed mortgage industry. The announcement is expected to include a dramatic expansion of the Troubled Asset Recovery Program, under which the U.S. Treasury will either directly control or have a significant interest in most mortgages, either through the creation of a special federal bank for failing loans or with enhanced federal guarantees to back up failing loans.

This is an extension of a policy already in effect. On July 30 of last year, the U.S. government took over Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which own or guarantee at least one-half of all mortgage loans, through the Housing and Economic Recovery Act. That laid the groundwork for TARP. In January the government announced that in addition to bailout gifts of \$45 billion each to Citigroup and Bank of America, the government will guarantee \$300 billion in bad loans for Citigroup and \$100 billion in bad loans for Bank of America.

What this means for workers and poor

Both TARP and HERA contain buried language ignored by Congress, the media and the mortgage industry that potentially offers significant protections for homeowners.

For example, 12 USC 5219 in TARP states: “To the extent that the Secretary acquires mortgages, mortgage backed securities, and other assets secured by residential real estate, including multi-family housing, the Secretary shall implement a plan that seeks to maximize assistance for homeowners and use the authority of the Secretary to encourage the servicers of the underlying mortgages, considering net present value to the taxpayer, to take advantage of ... available programs to minimize foreclosures. In addition, the Secretary may use loan guarantees and credit enhancements to facilitate loan modifications to prevent avoidable foreclosures.”

Section 1403 of HERA amends the federal Truth in Lending Act and places a duty on servicers of residential pooled mortgages to carry out loan modifications or workout plans when the value of the plans would exceed the value to be derived from foreclosing the homes.

These loan modifications mandated by the bailout acts are significant because they force loan servicers to take into account the present value of homes and, especially

in the case of HERA, the value of the homes in foreclosure. In almost every part of the country, home values have dropped precipitously, so these laws mandate significant reductions in the principal of the loans. In cities like Detroit, where \$150,000 homes are selling for \$7,500 after the owners are foreclosed and evicted, these laws virtually mandate turning over the homes to their current owners.

There is no effective mechanism in place, however, for carrying out the provisions embodied in TARP and HERA on behalf of homeowners. It will take a mass struggle to enforce these laws and stop foreclosures.

Sheriff Evans got it right

On Feb. 2 Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans of Detroit, after examining the bailout bills, stopped all sheriff sales in the county. Sheriff sales are the first step in the foreclosure process in Michigan. There were approximately 500 sheriff sales per week in Wayne County.

Sheriff Evans stated, “The sheriff would violate the TARP by conducting mortgage foreclosure sales. ... The sheriff opens himself up to liability by foreclosing mortgages, or assets as they are defined in the TARP Act, that have been bought by the Secretary. The potential liability would arise if the sheriff ... forecloses a mortgage containing ‘troubled assets,’ thereby violating a homeowner’s right to loan modification, especially where the anticipated recovery on the principal outstanding obligation of the mortgage under the modification is likely to be greater than, on a net present value basis, the anticipated recovery on the principal outstanding obligation of the mortgage through foreclosures.” (www.waynecounty.com/sheriff)

Evans said he would not break federal law by continuing to carry out foreclosure sales.

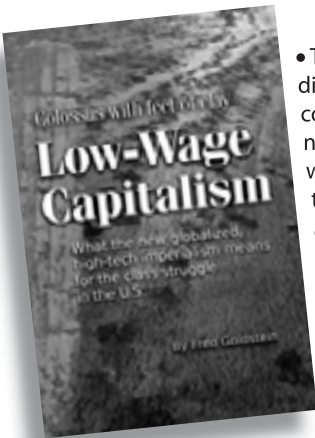
Sheriff Evans got it right. It’s important for activists throughout the country to express their solidarity with his actions, which are under severe attack from the finance industry and the media. Email your support to Evans’ press secretary at jroach@co.wayne.mi.us. Sheriff Evans’ actions set a precedent for the entire country and provide activists with ammunition to demand that local government bodies that carry out foreclosures in their areas immediately cease and desist.

Goldberg is a Detroit attorney and organizer with the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures and Evictions.

Low-Wage Capitalism

A timely new book by Fred Goldstein describes in sweeping detail the drastic effect on the working class of new technology and the restructuring of global capitalism in the post-Soviet era. It uses Karl Marx’s law of wages and other findings to show that these developments are not only continuing to drive down wages but are creating the material basis for future social upheaval. The analysis rests on three basic developments in the last three decades:

- The world’s workforce available to exploitation by transnational capitalist corporations doubled in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and Eastern Europe.



- The technological revolutions of the digital age, in both production and communications, have allowed transnational corporations to destroy high-wage jobs and simultaneously expand the global workforce to generate a worldwide wage competition.
- The decline in the economic condition of the workers, driven by the laws of capitalism and the capitalist class, is leading to the end of working-class compromise and retreat and must end up in a profound revival of the struggle against capital.

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Solidarity with immigrants in NYC

Because of her record of hostility to immigrants, Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand's appointment to replace Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in the U.S. Senate has drawn opposition. Many prominent Black and Latin@ community leaders joined City Councilmember Charles Barron on Feb. 5 in New York City for a news conference to criticize her appointment. Among them were representatives from 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement and Brenda Stokely of the Million Worker March. Leaders of the Latin@ community included members of the May 1 Coalition and Ydanis Rodriguez, a community leader from Washington Heights. The speakers voiced their solidarity with the immigrant community and called Gillibrand's selection for Senator "an attack on immigrants."

—Teresa Gutierrez



PHOTO: ROBERTO MERCADO

What can stop layoffs? Organize to fight back now

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attack by the waves of layoffs. There are hundreds of municipal and regional labor councils whose members are under siege or living in fear of layoffs, shortened hours and demands for concessions.

This vast network of potential working class power is lying dormant as the top labor leaders try to avoid mobilizing the workers to push back. The labor leadership is understandably focused for the moment on pushing through a legislative victory for the Employee Free Choice Act, which legalizes the card check system for union organizing. But this measure, important as it is in the day-to-day campaign to organize unions, will not meet the urgent needs of the millions falling under the ax of layoffs or losing their health care and their homes on a daily basis.

Most importantly, these measures fail to blunt future layoffs. The layoffs arise from the urgent needs of the capitalists to preserve their profits and cut their losses.

The rank and file must get organized within their locals, within their unions and within the union movement as a whole and unite with the communities and activists all over the country to develop a genuine fighting force. Neither John Sweeney of the AFL-CIO nor Andrew Stern of SEIU/Change to Win has represented the labor movement or the working class as a whole in this crisis.

French workers set example

These leaders should contemplate what just took place in France, where 2.5 million people, led by the unions, struck and/or marched to demand priority be given to protecting and creating jobs. The French workers shut down major cities, from Paris to Marseilles, as all the unions united for a show of strength. Of course, the French working class movement has a great tradition of class struggle.

But the workers in the U.S. have a history of struggle as well. During the 1930s they carried out marches and rallies of the unemployed. The Workers Alliance and the Unemployed Councils put hundreds of thousands of people who had been evicted back in their homes. They carried out citywide general strikes. The workers initiated hundreds of sit-down strikes. This is a history and tradition that can and must be revived.

The bosses, bankers and their "experts" are fully aware of this history, more so than are most workers at the moment. That is one of the reasons they were so anxious to settle the Republic Windows and Doors sit-down: the fear that it would become contagious in the midst of a layoff crisis.

Each time they announce a new figure for layoffs that is "the highest" since 1983,

or 1972, or declare the crisis to be the "worst since the Great Depression," they keep their fingers crossed that the working class in general, including the oppressed—the African American, Latina/o, Asian and Native communities—will get frightened, demoralized and retreat into trying to deal with the crisis on an individual basis.

But everyone knows in their bones that this crisis cannot be fought on an individual basis. Organization is the most important weapon that the working class and the oppressed have.

The capitalist system is in the midst of a major, global crisis of overproduction. There is a glut of commodities that cannot be sold because the entire capitalist class all over the world, in the race for profits,

has lowered wages and increased production. That is what is called capitalist anarchy of production.

In the auto industry the global capacity could produce 90 million autos a year. Present production is 66 million a year. Semiconductors are used in everything from iPods to airplanes, yet the semiconductor industry is operating at 66 percent of capacity. Even the oil industry is operating far below capacity.

Why? Because the masses do not have the money to purchase the vast inventories of commodities that have been built up by their own labor as the bosses race for profits and market share. So production shuts down. Plants and offices are destroyed or sit idle.

The only thing that can change the course of the crisis is the conscious, organized intervention of the workers and the communities to defend themselves—to demand the right to a job, to housing, to health care, to education and to social services of all kinds.

The process of getting organized for struggle is a difficult one. But there is no other course. The only social force that can bail out the workers, the only force that is going to stop the layoffs, the foreclosures and evictions, the racist attacks, the sexist inequality of wages and abuse of women, the raids on undocumented workers—that is going to stop all forms of oppression—is the might of the organized, multinational working class. □

Activists tell Michigan governor:

'Stop foreclosures & evictions, moratorium now!'

By Kris Hamel
Lansing, Mich.

Activists fighting to stop home foreclosures and community devastation gathered in the bitter cold outside the state Capitol here on Feb. 3 as Gov. Jennifer Granholm delivered her annual State of the State address. The action was called by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures and Evictions.

The protesters were buoyed by Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans' announcement on Feb. 2 that his office was immediately suspending sheriff sales of foreclosed homes in Detroit.

Evans had previously written to Granholm asking for a declaration of a state of emergency in the county and a six-month moratorium on foreclosures. The governor's office summarily dismissed the sheriff's letter and denied his requests. Many activists saw this as a racist reaction and yet another sign of Granholm's disconnect with the suffering masses in Michigan.

For over two years organizers have been fighting for a moratorium to halt the widespread foreclosure crisis engulfing every part of the state. Gov. Granholm has rejected demands that she declare a state of economic emergency and impose a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions. She falsely claims she has no legal authority to do so and has publicly stated that any solution in Michigan to the housing foreclosure disaster must "satisfy" the banks.



WW PHOTO: ALAN POLLOCK

Lansing, Mich., Feb. 3.

In her speech Granholm stuck to her unbelievable, long-time script of "things are going to get better." But she announced no plans or initiatives in this direction. Instead, huge budget cuts and layoffs are on the horizon. Michigan is already wracked by 10.6-percent unemployment, hundreds of shuttered factories, widespread poverty and mass foreclosures.

Demonstrators kept up a spirited action in front of the Capitol building as speakers entered the event, which was closed to the public. A huge sound system carried

their message for blocks: "Stop foreclosures and evictions, moratorium now!" A graphic display of large photos of abandoned, vandalized homes lined the main sidewalk.

When temperatures got too cold for activists to remain outdoors, they marched into the Capitol where they were stopped by security. The protesters managed to take over a room where they held an indoor rally and speak-out. Everyone vowed to continue the fight by whatever means necessary. □

Marx, Darwin and the upheaval in the biological sciences

By Sam Marcy

We reprint here excerpts from an essay originally published in the Workers World of March 25, 1983, to coincide with the centennial of the death of Karl Marx. This year we celebrate the bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth and 150 years since the publication of his "On the Origin of Species." The following is only a small part of Marcy's essay; the full text, which takes up such profound developments as genetic engineering, can be found at workers.org.

It would be wholly inappropriate and indeed regrettable to discuss the centennial of Marx's death without touching on the relationship between Marxism and Darwinism, and on the relation of Marx and Darwin as contemporaries who also corresponded with each other. The current upheaval in the biological sciences should indeed deepen interest in both the natural sciences as well as Marxism.

Two giants of science

Kliment Timiriazhev, one of the very first in old Russia to have been a great Darwinian naturalist and incidentally one of the first to acquaint himself with Marx's "Capital" when it was first published in Russia, wrote on the publication of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" and Marx's "Critique of Political Economy": "When we commemorate the publication of these two books, when we think of it as a joint commemoration of Marx and Darwin, we do so recognizing that the two men marched side-by-side under the

banner of natural science. Both of them regarded natural science as the one solid foundation for their revolutionary views, views that were destined to shake up both the 'consciousness' and the existence of all mankind."

Timiriazhev refers of course to Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" and Marx's "Critique of Political Economy" because the fact they were published in the same year is such a striking illustration of the nature of the epoch in which they made their great discoveries.

It was still the so-called progressive epoch of the bourgeoisie. Darwin's rather quick acceptance was due to the fact that some of the leading biologists at the time, including J. Hooker, A. Wallace, and Thomas Huxley in Great Britain, Haeckel, Muller, and Weisman in Germany, and some in the United States, accepted the Darwinian doctrine. Thus the bourgeoisie was ready, but not altogether and not until after a lot of acrimonious discussion and struggle, to accept Darwin. But it was altogether different with Marx. Under no circumstances could they accept Marx's conclusions in his "Critique of Political Economy." A conspiracy of silence veiled the discoveries of Marx except among the revolutionary working class elements of the time.

Marx and Engels hailed Darwin

When "On the Origin of Species" was published on Nov. 24, 1859, Engels immediately got hold of the book and as early as Dec. 12 of that year wrote to Marx, "The Darwin which I am just reading is really stupendous. Teleology in one respect had

still not been finished off hitherto. It is now. Moreover, there has never yet been such a magnificent attempt to demonstrate historical development in nature, or at least not so happily."

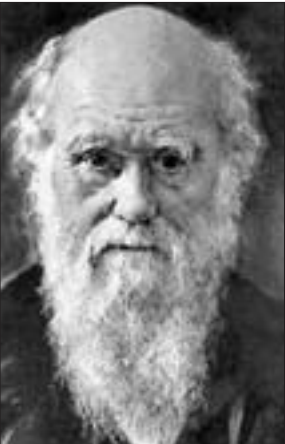
"On the Origin of Species" was an application of the materialist method, a demonstration of the dialectical and materialist view of organic nature. It is precisely what Marx and Engels were formulating as applied to the field of social development, of historical materialism, and especially their economic doctrines.

Lenin on evolution

It should be noted that Lenin summed up the relation of Marxism to Darwinism as follows: "Just as Darwin put an end to the view of animal and plant species being unconnected, fortuitous, 'created by God' and immutable, and was the first to put biology on an absolutely scientific basis by establishing the mutability and the succession of species, so Marx put an end to the view of society being a mechanical aggregation of individuals and was the first to put sociology on a scientific basis by establishing the concept of the economic formation of society as the sum-total of given production relations, by establishing the fact that the development of such formations is a process of natural history."

Scientists debate how, not if evolution occurred

It seems that the biologists breathed a sigh of relief during the centennial of



Charles Darwin

Darwin's death when no big bombshell from the right-wing "creationist" camp was hurled at them. This year it was anthropology that came under attack with the sensational publication of Derek Freeman's "Margaret Mead—the

making and unmaking of an anthropological myth." Freeman's political motivation is clearly aimed to bolster the reactionary school of sociobiology.

In its struggle against Darwinian evolution, the reactionary right had hoped to capture at least one defector from the scientific community to hold up as exhibit No. 1 to demolish Darwinism and fortify the fraudulent basis of "creationism." But nothing like that occurred. Quite the contrary. The assaults of the "creationists," well financed and well coordinated, were unable to gain a foothold in the biological scientific community. The 1983 Book of the Year of the Encyclopedia Britannica, which covers the events of 1982, remarks in its Life Sciences report, "The efforts of creationists notwithstanding, the theory of biological evolution remained alive and healthy and a powerful intellectual stimulus in 1982, a hundred years after the death of Charles Darwin."

To the present time, the efforts of the creationists to intervene in the debate to try to exploit and obscure the issues have not affected the continuing struggle to find new approaches to evolutionary theory. □

Community activists crash CEO's conclave

By Jaimeson Champion
New York

A coalition of community activists interrupted a Feb. 3 conference of New York's corporate elite, demanding that the needs of poor and working-class New Yorkers come before the wishes of Wall Street's power brokers.

The "Future of New York" conference was held at the posh Grand Hyatt Hotel and featured keynote speakers Jamie Dimon, chairman and CEO of JPMorgan Chase, and Robert Greifeld, CEO of the NASDAQ stock exchange. The themes of the conference concerned how the city could best meet the demands of the bankers and bosses during this time of economic crisis.

As New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg delivered a speech promising to continue the mayoral tradition of catering to the wishes of Wall Street, community activists from the Right To The City alliance were able to breach conference security. Carrying placards, demonstrators interrupted Bloomberg's platitudes to say that any discussion on the future of New York must include the voices of poor and working-class New Yorkers. They demanded inclusion in all decision-making processes that will impact their lives and communities.

A number of the demonstrators were unjustly arrested, detained and charged with "disorderly conduct." (Reuters)

RTTC is a grassroots network of community activists from cities across the U.S. dedicated to resisting gentrification and other anti-people attacks in urban

areas. In New York City, RTTC alliance members include such organizations as FIERCE, Community Voices Heard, Make the Road NY, Picture the Homeless and NYC AIDS Housing Network/VOCAL, among others.

In New York, as in other cities and towns across the U.S., jobs are being lost en masse, foreclosures and evictions continue unabated, the cost of public transportation is rising, while social services are being slashed and eliminated.

Outraged New Yorkers are uniting to say that the continual handouts by the government to Wall Street at a time when millions of people are teetering on the edge of survival are a callous and criminal assault on the working class that will not be tolerated. It is time for the bankers and bosses to pay for the misery and suffering they have unleashed.

Activists are gearing up for two days of marching on Wall Street on April 3 and 4. The action will coincide with the

anniversary of the day Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lost his life in 1968 struggling for social and economic justice. Marchers will demand that the needs of the masses of people who are suffering through this economic meltdown come before the wants of Wall Street and the superrich.

A planning meeting for the April 3-4 march on Wall Street will be held at the CUNY Graduate Center in Manhattan on Feb 18. For more information, visit www.bailoutpeople.org. □

EFCA: Why workers need it

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AFL-CIO, as well as the independent United Electrical workers—whose members occupied the Republic Windows and Doors factory in December—actively champion the EFCA.

The fight for union representation at Smithfield Packing in Tarheel, N.C., shows why workers need the EFCA. In December the mostly African-American and Latina/o workforce won union representation with the United Food and Commercial Workers after a 15-year struggle. On a good day, working conditions at the gargantuan hog slaughtering and processing plant are cold, wet, grueling and dangerous.

Union supporter Lorena Ramos' personal story is on YouTube.com. She was arrested in the plant by company police in 2004. Held inside the plant, hit in the face with a folder and told she had "no

rights," even to call and check on her children, Smithfield officials tried to intimidate her to sign documents she did not understand.

One-on-one anti-union meetings with the front line supervisor are forced on workers in 78 percent of organizing efforts (aflcio.org), and even when workers win their right to a union, nearly half of new union certifications never get a contract.

Who's opposing the EFCA?

The National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and banking interests are all pumping money into a public relations campaign to defeat the EFCA.

The Huffington Post reported that on Oct. 17, Bank of America, only three days after receiving a \$25 billion bailout, hosted a conference-call meeting with AIG,

Home Depot chief Bernie Marcus, corporate lobbyist Rick Berman and others to raise anti-EFCA funds.

According to SourceWatch.org, Berman, formerly a labor law director for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, currently runs the misnamed Center for Union Facts, which attacks the EFCA. Big business isn't only anti-union. Berman also opposed the Americans with Disabilities Act, supported using the Alar apple pesticide and backed the tobacco industry.

Struggle won NLRA of 1935

The EFCA is a pro-labor amendment to the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Rising out of the economic depression that followed the 1929 stock market crash, by 1935 an upsurge of pitched battles including general strikes in Toledo,

Continued on the next page

‘Milk’ keeps focus on mass struggle

By Shelley Ettinger

Often on my walk to the subway after work, I pass a group of exuberant teenagers gathered outside a nondescript doorway in an unremarkable building in lower Manhattan. I smile. Sometimes we kid around a little. They call me “auntie.” The encounter always leaves me happy and hopeful.

For these are not just any teens, hanging out just anywhere. They are students at the Harvey Milk School, New York City’s alternative public high school for lesbian, gay, bi and trans youths. The school, the students’ sass and confidence, our banter—all of it was made possible by the last 40 years of struggle for LGBT rights and liberation.

Some of the high points in that struggle came in the mid- to late-1970s in San Francisco. Harvey Milk was in the thick of it, rising to national renown. As an activist community leader and, eventually, as an elected city supervisor from the heavily gay Castro district, Milk became a symbol of the LGBT movement. He was also a strong advocate of linking up with the labor movement and the anti-racist struggle.

For all this, he was assassinated. In November 1978, Dan White, a racist, anti-gay former police officer who had just resigned from his city supervisor



post, shot Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk to death inside San Francisco City Hall.

Now, 30 years later, comes the movie “Milk.” The film is nominated for eight Academy Awards, including Oscars for director Gus VanSant, writer Dustin Lance Black and actors Sean Penn in the lead role and Josh Brolin as the killer, White.

“Milk” is a rare film for, from the viewpoint of partisans for LGBT liberation, it deserves the acclaim it’s received. Although it is ostensibly about the title character, this is really a movie about something much bigger than one person.

This is a movie about an oppressed group organizing and fighting back.

The characterizations, in fact, are a bit thin. The writing doesn’t delve all that

deeply into Milk’s or any other character’s psyche. In this movie, that is a plus, because it maintains the focus right where it should be: on the mass struggle.

Scene after scene shows activists meeting, strategizing, taking to the streets. In scene after scene, Milk says something along the lines of, “This isn’t about me as an individual. This is bigger than me. This is about a movement.”

For someone like me who took part in that movement in those days, though far from San Francisco, watching “Milk” brings back many memories. Here is the singer and evangelist Anita Bryant leading her “save the children” campaign to reverse cities’ and states’ gay-rights laws—and protesters dogging her every move. Here are the reactionaries campaigning for California’s Briggs Initiative, which would have barred lesbian and gay teachers from employment—and organizers mobilizing to defeat it. Here are people by the tens of thousands pouring into the streets time and again, refusing to be silent, refusing to be driven back into the closet.

That’s how it really was. It’s a stirring experience to see it enacted on screen.

The film doesn’t get everything right. Women are largely absent, even in the crowd scenes, which is bizarre and historically inaccurate. Also, with its emphasis on Milk, beloved and important as he was, the film omits the key role played by more radical forces in the movement.

If the filmmakers had asked me how to end this movie, I’d have suggested that rather than stopping at the death of Harvey Milk and that night’s mass candlelight march, then running some informational script about the aftermath, there should have been a final scene. It would have shown what happened when the assassin Dan White’s infamous “Twinkie defense”—at trial he claimed he was crazy from eating too much junk food—won him a slap-on-the-wrist, short prison sentence.

What happened was that once more the community took to the streets of San Francisco for Harvey Milk. Only this time their rage overflowed. Thousands headed to City Hall, chanting, “He got away with murder,” smashing windows, setting fire to police cars. It came to be known as the “White Night” rebellion.

This—rebellion against injustice—is the true legacy of Harvey Milk. We saw it in action again this past fall after the passage of the vicious Proposition 8 in California. We’ll keep seeing it until LGBT oppression is vanquished.

When there is no longer any need for a Harvey Milk School, when LGBT youths don’t have to fear for their physical safety, when repression and hiding and discrimination are bad old memories, the work of Milk and the countless, nameless others who battled for full rights will be complete. □

New life for anti-war f lm Pentagon suppressed

By Brenda Sandburg

For 37 years no one was able to see “FTA,” a riveting documentary of the anti-war show that Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland and others performed for GIs during the Vietnam War. The film was yanked from theaters one week after it opened in 1972, and all copies were destroyed. However, the original negatives were discovered a few years ago, and a reprint of the movie is now being released on DVD.

Sundance will broadcast this must-see movie on Feb. 23 at 9 p.m. and on Feb. 28 at 9 a.m. Docuramafilms is also distributing it on DVD so everyone can access it through Netflix and other outlets.

“FTA,” which stands for “F**k the Army,” played at the IFC Center in Manhattan on Feb. 2. Jane Fonda appeared in person to introduce the movie, along with David Zeiger, the director of “Sir! No Sir!,” and a representative of Iraq Veterans Against the War. “It really presents that time in a way that feels present and alive and real,” Zeiger said.

Fonda explained that the FTA show was intended to counter Bob Hope’s pro-war USO program. At the time, there was massive opposition to the war within military ranks, and GIs turned out in droves to

see entertainers who told the truth about their experiences. Fonda and Sutherland had just finished filming “Klute,” when Dr. Howard Levy, known for refusing to train Green Berets, asked them to be part of the show.

Witty and moving, the production featured satirical skits (in one number Donald Sutherland and Michael Alaimo call out what’s happening on the battlefield like baseball sportscasters), songs (Rita Martinson’s “Dear Soldier” is remarkable), and searing commentary (Sutherland’s closing call for people to point the gun at the war makers is stunning).

President Richard Nixon would not allow the troupe to take their show to South Vietnam as Bob Hope did, nor permit them on U.S. military bases. Instead, they performed outside bases in Hawaii, the Philippines, Okinawa and Japan. During the two-week tour they held 21 performances for more than 60,000 service men and women.

Fonda said the military tried to keep them away by issuing releases that gave the wrong times for the show. But she said they waited until the audience turned up, and when thousands were unable to get into the packed venue, they held additional shows so everyone could see it.



WW PHOTO: BRENDA SANDBURG

Jane Fonda

“FTA” mixes excerpts from the show with interviews of GIs who talk about the government’s deception and the racism and sexism in the military. One Black GI says Black men should be exempt from the war. “The only place a Black man should fight is where he’s being oppressed,” he says. “I’m not being oppressed in Japan, Pakistan or Vietnam.”

The film also reveals what life was like for people living near U.S. bases. In the Philippines women and girls were forced into prostitution by poverty. One soldier says the prostitutes were required to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and to wear green badges in bars to indicate they were disease free.

In Japan, a man describes what happened when the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Standing by a river, he says the explosion rose 2,000 feet at the epicenter and thousands of people jumped into the boiling river to escape the heat.

Zeiger was instrumental in bringing this extraordinary film back to life. While making “Sir! No Sir!,” a stirring account of GI resistance to the Vietnam War, he tracked down the people who produced “FTA.” He discovered that “FTA” director Francine Parker had just the year before found the original 16-millimeter negative in a vault where it had been edited. She had blown it up into a 35-millimeter print but did not go further, as it appeared thousands of dollars in back taxes were owed on the film.

Zeiger discovered this was not the case, however, and took “FTA” to the Sundance channel. □

Minneapolis and San Francisco asserted workers’ power.

Won by workers in the streets, the NLRA for the first time legally recognized workers’ rights to “self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organization, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing ... and to engage in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection.”

U.S. unions were formerly outlawed as conspiracies. Still the NLRA did not include agricultural, domestic or railroad workers, thus excluding many African-American, Latina/o and Asian workers.

By developing a framework to mediate the class struggle, the NLRA was a concession to “protect commerce.” Its opening paragraphs state so plainly: “Experience has proved that protection by law of the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively safeguards commerce from injury, impairment, or interruption ... by restoring equality of bargaining power between employers and employees.”

Although today’s mouthpieces for the bosses and bankers claim the EFCA is unfair, it’s only a small step toward overcoming the inherent and extreme bias favoring management in capitalist labor

relations. The same corporate interests fighting the EFCA today wrote the anti-union 1947 Taft-Hartley Act.

Taft-Hartley levies steep penalties, including injunctions and fines, if workers and their unions exercise their NLRA rights. It allows bosses “free-speech” rights to interfere in organizing (“Low Wage Capitalism,” p. 251) and encouraged the state-by-state “right-to-work” laws enacted predominantly in the South—with its history of enslaved Black labor—and in the West to create internal low-wage havens.

In “Low Wage Capitalism,” Fred Goldstein notes: “The bosses have the right to

get ‘mutual aid’ from other bosses—who buy their products, for example, and thus help them with revenue while workers are losing pay by being out on strike. Big capitalists get lines of credit from the banks in preparation for and during strikes, and thus engage in ‘concerted activity’ against the workers. But workers are forbidden to ask for or receive ‘mutual aid and protection’ through the ‘concerted activities’ of other unions in the form of sympathy strikes or boycotts, etc.”

Passage of the EFCA won’t end the class struggle or repeal Taft-Hartley, but will improve workers’ chances to gain a union. □

The origins of Black History Month

By Dolores Cox

February is designated as Black History Month in the U.S. It is also celebrated in many other countries in the African Diaspora. Black History Month was initiated in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson as “Negro History Week.” In 1976, the 200th anniversary of the U.S., the week was extended to one month, allowing for more inclusion of activities and programs.

Woodson chose the second week in February because both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass were born in February. Woodson saw them as two men who had significantly influenced the lives and social conditions of African Americans.

Lincoln was the U.S. president who signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, leading to the abolition of slavery. Douglass was born in 1817 in Maryland, the son of an enslaved woman and her white master. He was taken from his mother when he was an infant. When he was in his early 20s, he escaped from slavery.

Douglass was self-educated and became a fierce abolitionist. He was a newspaper editor and lecturer, known for his great oratory skills. He was an activist for women’s rights and an advisor to President

Lincoln. He and Lincoln frequently debated the issue of slavery. Douglass is known for one of his phrases, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

Carter G. Woodson was a Ph.D. scholar from Harvard University whose parents were formerly enslaved. In 1916 he established the Journal of Negro History on Black people in U.S. history. He also established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (later, “Negro” was changed to “African American”).

Woodson initiated “Negro History Week” in order to bring attention to the significant contributions to U.S. society that Black people had made and to show that their history was an integral part of U.S. history. He noted that there was no respectable mention of Black people in history books; that they were either ignored or mainly represented as slaves, slave descendents or referenced by their designated inferior social positions.

The initial contribution of Blacks in the U.S. was, of course, the 246 years of enslaved African labor which greatly contributed to the U.S. becoming the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world.

The election of President Barack Obama represents the latest chapter of African-American achievements. However, for a

brief period of time (1867-1877) when the emancipation of Blacks during the Reconstruction Era guaranteed ex-slaves citizenship status and the right to vote, Black men became politically active, holding 16 seats in Congress and 600 seats in state legislatures. A violent, racist white backlash ended this progressive era. One hundred years of “Jim Crow” laws, legalizing discrimination and segregation, including terror against Blacks, followed.

Black History Month celebrates the accomplishments and contributions of Black people in the U.S. in the fields of medicine, law, science and history as well as Black inventors and explorers. It also celebrates Black culture in the areas of art, dance, literature and music. The role of Black labor along with political movements, such as Pan-Africanism, Black Power, Garveyism, the right to self-defense and Black Nationalism, are honored.

Black History Month also commemorates Black economic and civic organizations, such as the NAACP (formerly the Niagara Movement), which was co-founded by W.E.B. DuBois in 1909. DuBois, born of ex-slaves, was a political activ-



ist, writer and historian, well known for “The Souls of Black Folks,” published 1903. The NAACP is currently celebrating its 100-year anniversary.

Additionally, the month celebrates religious institutions, as well as Blacks in sports. Recognition is also given to the fact that Blacks have fought in every major U.S. war, including the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

Black history also includes several civil rights movements from the years 1896 through 1968. Following the initial involuntary mass migration out of Africa, there were several large voluntary migrations of Black people out of the South from 1896 to the end of the 1960s.

Black History Month provides an important opportunity to shed an even brighter spotlight on the legacy of oppression and injustices in the form of political, economic and social inequalities that Black people still face today and to push forward with the struggles to win full equality.

Black people are a global people. Their history started in Africa, where the civilization of humankind began, with science, math, religion and the written word. Unfortunately, though, U.S. public school systems and institutions of higher learning are still resisting the full inclusion of Black history in the curriculum of world history, not just for one month but all year round. □

Petition says ‘stop frame-up of Chuck Turner’

By Frank Neisser
Boston

In collaboration with the International Action Center, City Councilor Chuck Turner has launched a new phase of his “Campaign for Truth, Light and Justice,” focusing national and international attention not just on frame-up charges against Turner but also on eight years of corrupt practices by the Bush administration’s Department of “Justice.”

Turner has been fighting back ever since his fraudulent Nov. 21 arrest on baseless charges of extorting \$1,000 to help obtain a liquor license. Supporters assert that the arrest is clearly an effort by right-wing law enforcement officials to deprive Boston’s African-American community of its elected leadership and to silence the leading voice for the most oppressed and disenfranchised in Boston.

A petition appeals to President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder to drop the fraudulent charges against Turner; investigate all pending indictments of public officials and drop those that are racially and politically motivated; review all convictions made during the Bush administration to determine which were based on racial or political motivation and should therefore be overturned; initiate legal action against U.S. attorneys



and attorneys general who set up politically and/or racially motivated indictments and prosecutions; and initiate legislation to end collusion between prosecutors and the media that destroys the opportunity for a fair trial by distributing government allegations before arraignments, indictments or trials have taken place. To sign the petition, go to supportchuckturner.com.

Turner’s public campaign speaking out against the fraudulent frame-up against him has been meeting with success. Public rallies drawing hundreds of activists and community members have put the case against him on trial.

In January, incoming City Council President Michael Ross fired federal Judge Charles B. Swartwood III, who

had been hired by Ross’s predecessor, Maureen Feeney, to investigate Turner and “advise” the council on what action to take. Ross admitted that any investigation other than a fair trial in a court of law is a waste of the council’s time and money.

On Dec. 17, Ramsey Clark, winner of the 2008 U.N. Human Rights Award, conducted a press rally with Turner in front of the JFK Federal Building. Clark condemned the politically motivated prosecution and lauded Turner’s 40-year career fighting for civil rights and social justice. He called for an investigation of the investigators and prosecution of the prosecutors.

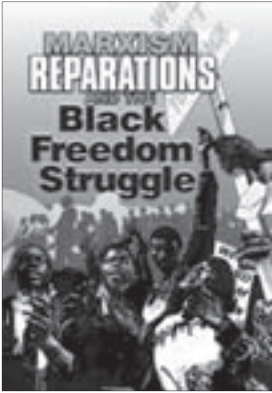
U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan is attempting to silence Turner by demanding he sign a gag order before receiving the discovery information that is the constitutional right of any defendant. Turner has refused to sign, saying through his lawyers that signing the order would leave him helpless to defend himself. Turner contends that signing such an order would give the U.S. attorney free rein to continue trying him in the media with the release of fragmentary allegations and misinformation.

At Turner’s next court appearance on Feb. 25 at 3 p.m. in Moakley Federal Courthouse, the judge will rule on the gag order. Turner is holding a rally the evening before the court appearance at 6:30 p.m., in the cafeteria at Roxbury Community College. □

MARXISM, REPARATIONS & the Black Freedom Struggle

An anthology of writings from Workers World newspaper. Edited by Monica Moorehead. Includes:

- Racism, national oppression & self-determination by Larry Holmes
- Black labor from chattel slavery to wage slavery by Sam Marcy
- Harriet Tubman: woman warrior by Mumia Abu-Jamal
- Causes of turmoil in Jamaica by Pat Chin
- Black youth: repression & resistance by LeiLani Dowell
- Black and Brown unity: A pillar of struggle for human rights & global justice! by Saladin Muhammad
- Are conditions ripe again today? 40th anniversary of the 1965 Watts Rebellion by John Parker
- Racism and poverty in the Delta by Larry Hales
- Domestic Workers United demand passage of a bill of rights by Imani Henry
- Black Reconstruction: The unfinished revolution by Minnie Bruce Pratt



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March on Wall Street on the anniversary on the day Martin Luther King gave his life fighting for social and economic justice.

Just as King knew that the struggle for civil rights at home had to also be part of the struggle against war abroad, he understood that no one, regardless of their race would be free until everyone had the right to a decent paying job or an income for those unable to work.

*Yes, 2 days. The protest will start on **Friday April 3.** More people from all across the country will join us on **Saturday April 4***

Partial list of endorsers of the March on Wall Street. Ad Hoc National Network to Stop Foreclosures & Evictions; Black Workers for Justice, Raleigh, NC; No. Carolina Public Service Workers Union-UE L. 150; Moratorium Now! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures & Evictions (Mich.); Labor/Community Coalition to Stop Foreclosures & Evictions (Calif.); BAYAN USA; May 1 Coalition For Worker & Immigrant Rights (NYC); Million Worker March Movement East; Chris Silvera, Sec-Treas., Teamster L. 808; Harlem Tenants Council, NY, NY; Private Health Insurance Must Go Coalition, NYC; Charles Barron, member, NYC Council*; Queers for Peace & Justice; Women's Fightback Network (Mass.); Fight Imperialism, Stand Together (FIST youth); Int'l Action Center; Action Center For Justice, Charlotte, NC; Queers Without Borders, Hartford, CT; Maine Green Independent Party; ME; Guyanese American Workers United, NY, NY; Pakistan USA Freedom Forum; Troops Out Now Coalition; *For more endorsers, or to endorse go to **www.bailoutpeople.org***

* For identification purposes only

The class character of violence

By Larry Hales

Any serious attempt to delve into the nature of violence—where it comes from and its uses—has to analyze it from a class perspective, taking into account the most oppressed among the working class.

Capitalism is a violent system, based on extracting surplus that is gained by exploitation. The ruling class perpetuates the capitalist system from this surplus. It hoards part of the profit, but uses the vast majority to increase its influence and pursue more profit by securing more markets, advances in machinery, greater and cheaper access to resources and other means.

Even during times of economic prosperity there is still exploitation. Though the capitalists may extend more to the workers, the amount given is still greatly unequal to the wealth being produced. The capitalist is merely biding time until an economic decline, when gains made by the workers are taken away.

Any system based on profit is inherently violent. Karl Marx wrote in “The Communist Manifesto”: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

The fight is perpetual. As long as classes exist, the threat of violence always looms.

How would the slave see freedom without fighting against the slave master? The goal of one is to realize freedom, while the goal of the other is wealth and greater wealth. When the slave refuses to be a slave, only force changes the equation. The slave master cares only about profit, not the humanity of the slave—but values his life over profit when the slave gives no other choice.

Violence of poverty and the state

Chattel slavery in the U.S. ceases to exist, and throughout the world it is an antiquated system, only existing in small pockets. Yet the struggle continues still, as workers fight for their rights and dignity. As the price of subsistence far outpaces wages, workers find it harder and harder to live.

The denial of a person's right to housing, food, clothing and all the things necessary to subsist creates hardship and despair. If ever a person tries to commandeer these necessities without paying, that person is then confronted by the police and the courts.

The state—police, courts, jails, prisons and military—exist to enforce the will of those in power—the capitalist class. The state would not be necessary if there were no antagonism, no ill will in the larger society, no classes.

In “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” Friedrich Engels

wrote that the state “is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself. ... In order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict and keeping it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.”

Whenever there is a strike or a rally, the police, as agents of the state, stand by—not to protect the strikers or protesters, but to protect the interests of the owners of the business being struck or of private property in general.

When the workers at Republic Windows and Doors occupied their factory in Chicago in December 2008, they faced being raided by the police. These workers acted after the owners gave them only three days' notice that they were closing the factory, in violation of the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act. The Rev. Jesse Jackson called their action “the beginning of a larger movement for mass action to resist economic violence.” (Chi-Town Daily News, Dec. 7)

The violence of the system can be read-

ily viewed in the imperialist U.S. There are millions of homeless on the streets. In their 2007 annual report, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty reported that between 2.3 and 3.5 million people experience homelessness every year. No doubt that figure has risen since the economic crisis began. But there is ample housing. In fact, there is a glut of empty apartments, condos and houses. The construction binge partly precipitated the economic crisis.

Millions in the U.S. go hungry, yet the problem isn't scarcity but ability to pay. The hurricane Katrina tragedy and the deepening economic crisis both reveal to the world the precariousness of the so-called “American Dream,” which is in reality a false notion. Poverty and disparity are abundant in the world's richest country and are growing as total unemployment continues beyond the 20 million mark.

This economic violence not only breeds struggle from workers and the oppressed, but the dog-eat-dog world of capitalism—where workers are forced to prey upon one another to climb ahead—breeds antisocial behavior and other types of violence, such as domestic violence.

The next parts of this series will focus on struggles in oppressed communities, internally and abroad, state repression of oppressed workers and fighting back.

PART ONE

LEGAL UPDATE

Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeals



Following are excerpts from a legal update written by Abu-Jamal's lead counsel, Robert R. Bryan, on Feb. 8.

On Feb. 4, 2009, the U.S. Supreme Court docketed and accepted for filing the Petition for Writ of Certiorari, with supporting Appendix, that I had submitted Dec. 19, 2008, on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal. (Abu-Jamal v. Beard, U.S. Sup. Ct. No. 08-8483.)

[Go to www.millions4mumia.org to read the petition.] The central issue in this case is racism in jury selection. The prosecution systematically removed people from sitting on the trial jury purely because of the color of their skin; that is, being black. The bigotry that killed Martin Luther King, Jr., so many years ago, has been rampant in the case of my client and is a central part of the state's quest to murder him in the name of the law.

In an entirely separate case (Beard v. Abu-Jamal, Sup. Ct. No. 08-652), the prosecution is seeking to overturn the victory we achieved last year in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. (Abu-Jamal v. Horn, 520 F.3d 272 (3rd Cir. 2008).)

In that ruling the court ordered a new jury trial on the question of the death penalty. Our Brief In Opposition will be filed in the Supreme Court on Feb. 13, 2009.

The legal defense for Mumia needs help. The costs for our litigation in two cases before the Supreme Court are substantial. To help, please make your checks payable to the “National Lawyers Guild Foundation” (indicate “Mumia” on the bottom left). The donations are tax deductible, and should be mailed to: Committee To Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, P.O. Box 2012, New York, NY 10159-2012.

Mumia remains on Pennsylvania's death row. We are in an epic struggle in which his life hangs in the balance. What occurs now in the Supreme Court will determine whether Mumia will have a new jury trial, or die at the hands of the executioner.

As I have previously pointed out, Mumia is in greater danger than at any time since his 1981 arrest. Your support and activism is needed. This great journalist and author does not belong on death row or in prison. We must not rest until he is free.

Yours very truly, Robert R. Bryan
E-mail: RobertRBryan@aol.com



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New constitution wins popular vote in Bolivian referendum

By Donna Lazarus

Two million Bolivians voted in the Jan. 25 national referendum, with some 1.3 million of the 2 million voters—almost 62 percent—voting to approve the new constitution. This new document took two years to develop into a legal framework that overturns centuries of oppression of Bolivia’s marginalized masses. With its 500 articles, the constitution lays out rules to recognize Bolivia’s oppressed Indigenous peoples and offer them a voice in their future.

Bolivian law prohibits vehicular traffic on election/referendum days to prevent anyone from voting more than once. The 1.3 million arrived by foot or by donkey to vote for the new constitution and cheer its victory.

Cheers, fireworks and dynamite, Bolivian tin miners’ expression of solidarity, greeted President Evo Morales when he appeared on the presidential palace’s balcony, a few feet above his supporters.

On this momentous occasion in the history of Bolivia, Morales greeted the thousands who filled the Plaza de Murillo that evening in the capital, La Paz, saying, “Here begins a new Bolivia. Here we begin to reach true equality. We will break the chains of discrimination, segregation, racism, subordination, colonialism, and humiliation.” (NACLA, Jan. 27)

Morales continued, “I want you to know something: the colonial state ends here. Internal colonialism and external colonialism end here. Sisters and brothers, neocolonialism ends here, too.” The president was referring to the policies of Morales’s predecessor, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, known as Goni, who was ready to sell Bolivia’s rich natural resources at low cost to foreign buyers.



Bolivian miners march past Evo Morales in El Alto, just above La Paz, Feb. 7.

Goni’s use of violence against the Bolivian masses, who defended themselves and their country against exploitation, killed 80 workers and peasants. When an uprising forced Goni to flee the country in 2003, he settled in Florida. The Bolivians are trying to have him extradited, so he can face charges for his crimes against the people.

Peasants back constitution

Peasants in the countryside voted overwhelmingly for the constitution, which won handily in five of Bolivia’s nine departments, even in Chuquisaca, whose capital, Sucre, has been a center of opposition to Morales and his party, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS).

The Indigenous peasantry feel special resentment about the lack of support from capitalist and middle-class city dwellers.

The peasants feel that the cities would starve without them, and they should be recognized for feeding the country.

The constitution lost in the wealthy eastern departments of Pando, Santa Cruz, Beni and Tarija, where there has been organized and violent opposition to MAS policies and where the ruling politicians have called for secession. But even in this region, known as the Media Luna or half moon, 41 percent in Pando, 35 percent in Santa Cruz and 43 percent in Tarija voted for the new constitution. (Cambio, Jan. 28)

The new constitution calls such basic services as water, sewer, gas and electricity basic human rights, as well as education and health care. It recognizes the Afro-Bolivian community, as well as 36 Indigenous groups and their linguistic traditions, and provides for self-rule on

traditional lands. Article 5 promises the use of “at least two official languages, one of which must be Spanish and the other will be chosen taking into account the use, convenience, circumstances, necessities and preferences of the population.” (NACLA, Jan. 27)

In recognition of the spiritual and religious traditions of many indigenous groups, the constitution recognizes the Indigenous earth goddess Pachamama. The freedom of religion provision confirms the separation of church and state.

Morales’s right-wing opposition campaigned widely against this particular article, charging that it diminishes the power of the Catholic Church in Bolivia. Morales has asserted that the Catholic Church has supported the wealthy land-owners of Santa Cruz and has tried to turn back the clock to the feudal time of the last century.

Article 14, paragraph 11 reads, “The State prohibits and punishes all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity,” making Bolivia one of the first countries to include gender identity as part of their constitution.

The right-wing has mobilized an attack with billboards and media announcements saying gay marriages will abound and undermine Bolivian society. The new constitution, however, falls short of supporting the right of women to abortion.

The new constitution also prohibits the creation of U.S. military bases in Bolivia. The U.S. ambassador to Bolivia unceremoniously walked out of a recent speech by Morales in La Paz.

The Bolivian masses also voted for a 5,000-hectare limit on privately owned rural estates (a hectare is equal to about 2.5 acres).

In Bolivia, just 100 families own 25 million hectares. Two million peasants have access to only 5 million hectares, giving Bolivia, one of the poorest countries in the world, one of the highest concentrations of land in the hands of the fewest number of landowners. (ipsnews.net)

In response to the openly reactionary press in Bolivia, MAS founded its own newspaper, Cambio, the first issue of which was published on Jan. 22. Morales said that Bolivia was preparing to let the truth be known to the Bolivian people and that this newspaper “won’t humiliate anyone, but will inform and educate us.” (ipsnews.net)

Another recent development in Bolivia was the expulsion in January of the Israeli ambassador to Bolivia as a protest against Israel’s bombing of Gaza and massacres there.

On Feb. 7 there was a government- and trade union-sponsored celebration of the new constitution in El Alto, the Indigenous city on the plateau just above La Paz, which is home to 650,000 of Bolivia’s 9 million people. El Alto is known for its resistance to the bourgeois government of Goni and its sacrifice of many people to the struggle against neo-liberal policies. □

No money to send home

Global crisis cuts immigrants’ jobs

By David Hoskins

The global financial crisis is forcing emerging and underdeveloped economies throughout Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia to take a double whammy. Economic instability and corresponding job losses at home are compounded by a severe decline in remittances from the migrant workers who serve as a super-exploited segment of the working class in the industrialized capitalist economies of the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

Remittances are sums of money sent from individual migrant workers to their families and friends in their country of origin. The combined remittances of all migrant workers provide a substantial boost to underdeveloped economies. An estimated 150 million migrant workers worldwide sent more than \$300 billion home to their families in 2006.

U.N. International Fund for Agricultural Development statistics show that in 2006 remittances made up as much as 3 percent of the gross domestic product in Mexico, more than 12 percent of GDP in the Philippines and 21 percent of GDP in Haiti. Remittances accounted for a staggering 30 percent of GDP in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

Mexican remittances have taken a significant hit as the impact of anti-immi-

gration hysteria in the U.S. intersects with the financial crisis to severely reduce job opportunities for Mexican migrant workers.

Remittances are Mexico’s second largest source of foreign income after oil. Remittances dropped from \$26 billion in 2007 to \$25 billion in 2008. State repression of undocumented workers in the U.S., along with militarization of the border and the downturn in the U.S. construction industry, all contributed to the \$1 billion decline.

The Philippines’ economy is being negatively affected by a contraction in exports and a decline in remittances. The World Bank has projected a 1 percent decline in Philippine exports this year. More than 8 million Filipinos work overseas in countries such as the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Japan.

ANov. 8 article by Rosario Bella Guzman, the executive editor of the research group Ibon Foundation, makes the point that though the number of people from the Philippines working in the United States won’t necessarily go down, they may be fired and then “rehired in cheaper and lower quality jobs as the US economy continues to reel from the crisis.”

Guzman added that it is likely that “remittances will slow down due to falling and negative incomes and social services, and mounting debts in the host countries,

particularly the United States.”

African workers emigrate in significant numbers to countries of former European colonial powers such as France, Great Britain, Spain and Italy as well as to the U.S. There is also a significant amount of intercontinental emigration among African countries. Total remittances to and within Africa are close to \$40 billion for an average of about 5 percent of GDP for countries in the region. According to World Bank estimates, remittances to sub-Saharan Africa are set to fall in 2009 for the first time in over a decade.

The global financial crisis and the subsequent decline in remittances and exports contribute to the political and economic crises in underdeveloped countries all around the world. These conditions call for even greater solidarity from workers in the U.S., Western Europe and Japan as part of a struggle to stop any attacks on immigrant workers. □

What YOU should know about the hidden war in CONGO –past & present

By Abayomi Azikiwe Reprinted from Workers World

Summit fails to resolve crisis Nov. 20, 2008

Fighting continues in eastern Congo; imperialist states weigh intervention Colonialists plot return Nov. 13, 2008

E.U. ministers signal troop deployment to Congo

U.N. poised for broader intervention in Congo Oct. 30, Nov. 6, 2008

Historical background to the current crisis–In 3 parts

U.N. poised for broader intervention in Congo Oct. 23, 2008

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New Somalia government

Can it bring peace and stability?

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

A new president was inaugurated in the Horn of Africa nation of Somalia on Jan. 31. Former Union of Islamic Courts leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, 44, has pledged to open up negotiations with other organizations that remain isolated from the reformulated coalition.

Sheikh Sharif was elected at a parliamentary meeting in neighboring Djibouti after the collapse in late December of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) headed by Abdullahi Yusuf. The TFG had been propped up by U.S.-backed Ethiopian troops that invaded in December 2006, toppled the Union of Islamic Courts and occupied the country.

The Ethiopian government of Meles Zenawi had sent its army into Somalia, largely at the behest of the Bush administration, after the Union of Islamic Courts had established bases throughout large sections of the country. Fierce resistance to Ethiopia's occupation over the last two years resulted in the formal withdrawal of Ethiopian forces in early January.

Sheikh Sharif took control of the new regime after United-Nations-brokered negotiations to create a coalition government by bringing in groups that had resisted the U.S./Ethiopian-backed TFG.

Sharif stated on Feb. 9 in Mogadishu that he would institute sharia law in Somalia. In a meeting with Islamic leaders and government security forces, the president encouraged peace and reconciliation among Somali organizations.

It was reported that "Said Dhere, the commander of the Somali military forces, and some caretaker government ministers attended the meeting. 'We consider the role of every Somali citizen who can help bring peace to the nation,' said President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed." (Shabelle.net, Feb. 9)

Who is Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed?

He attended Islamic school in Somalia and later traveled to Sudan and Libya during the 1990s, where he was trained in geography. He became a high school teacher in Mogadishu prior to involvement in the resistance movement to Ethiopian occupation.

A former leader of the Islamic Courts Union, he fled into exile after the intervention of Ethiopian troops and was demonized by the U.S. He chaired a wing of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia

(ARS), which grew out of the resistance to the U.S.-backed Ethiopian occupation.

Since the disintegration of its plans to control Somalia through Ethiopian troops, Washington now calls this grouping "moderate." Another faction of ARS, headed by Hassan Dahir Aweys and based in Asmara, Eritrea, is considered more radical and has refused to join the new coalition government headed by Sheikh Sharif.

Sheik Sharif had surrendered to Kenyan military forces in early 2007 but was soon released. He returned initially to Somalia in November 2008 under the terms of a peace agreement reached in Djibouti in October.

Although he was involved in the resistance to the occupation, politically he is also considered a moderate in comparison to the Al-Shabab group, which is still fighting to bring about the removal of African Union peacekeeping forces (AMISOM).

The number of seats within the Somalia parliament has been doubled to 550 in order to take in 200 members from the Islamic Courts Union as well as 75 representatives from other opposition groups. In response to his election, Sheikh Sharif said that "My first priority is to bring peace to Somalia and I will serve the nation to the best of my ability." (Al-Jazeera, Feb. 7)

The former speaker of the Somalia parliament, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, spoke in favor of the ascendancy of Sheik Sharif, pointing out that he "is one of the most prominent figures in Somalia. Sheikh Sharif is the best choice to overcome the current crisis." (Al-Jazeera, Feb. 7)

Nonetheless, the Al-Shabab resistance

movement, which had been allied with the Islamic Courts Union, has rejected the Djibouti peace agreement and has continued to carry out armed actions against the government as well as the AMISOM forces. Al-Shabab has effectively taken control of large areas of the south and central regions of the country.

In a statement issued by Al-Shabab on Feb. 6, the resistance movement urged Somalis to intensify their struggle aimed at the removal of AU forces from the country. "We call on the African Union forces to pull out of our country or face resistance harsher than what they have ever experienced," Sheikh Muktar Robow, a leading figure in Al-Shabab, told the French Press Agency (AFP).

He spoke with reporters in Baidoa, a city under Al-Shabab control, and condemned the Feb. 5 massacre of 18 civilians by AU soldiers in Mogadishu. "We are telling them that we don't need their help if they are going to be massacring our people and I urge all holy fighters in the country to step up their struggle against them."

Al-Shabab has several thousand fighters under arms and is estimated to outnumber the ineffective Somalia security forces and the 3,200-member AMISOM contingent composed of troops from Uganda and Burundi.

Under the terms of the October peace agreement, Ethiopian forces were required to withdraw from the country. However, on Feb. 6 there were reports that Ethiopian troops had re-entered a Somalia border town and set up checkpoints to take money away from local residents. Sheikh

Abudurrahman Ibrahim Ma'ow, chair of the Council of Islamic Courts in Hiraan, said witnesses had verified the Ethiopian intervention. "We, the authorities in the region, will not accept it. If they do not leave within 24 hours we will fight with them." (Al-Jazeera, Feb. 6)

U.S. responsibility

The intervention of the U.S. under the Bush administration is largely responsible for the political and economic crisis existing now in Somalia. Since the U.S.-backed intervention by Ethiopia in December 2006, the country has experienced one of the worst humanitarian crises on the African continent.

Even though the new Obama administration has given its approval to the new administration of Sheikh Sharif, the people of Somalia must be paid reparations. More than 16,000 people have died and an estimated 1 million have been displaced since December 2006. The people of Somalia must be allowed to resolve their own internal affairs without the intervention of U.S. imperialism.

The former U.S.-backed regime collapsed because of the widespread resistance of the Somali masses. The people in Somalia have historically guarded their sovereignty and right to self-determination. This tradition has been strengthened through their experience of resisting U.S. interference over the last two years.

Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire and has been following developments in Somalia for many years.

Tamils protest bloody offensive

By David Hoskins

An estimated 45,000 Tamils in Toronto, Canada, took to the streets in a huge show of force on Jan. 30. They were protesting atrocities by the Sri Lankan army against civilians.

Tamils are a minority in Sri Lanka, a large island south of India where, for the last 25 years, an organization called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been fighting for the creation of a separate state for Tamils. The government recently launched a bloody offensive against them in the northern, Tamil-populated part of the island.

Toronto is home to 200,000 Tamils, one of the largest communities of Tamils outside southern India and Sri Lanka.

A day after the Toronto protest, more than 50,000 Tamils demonstrated in London.

In Toronto the protesters constructed a human chain in the downtown area and blocked traffic in a bid to call attention to what they described as Sri Lankan-government genocide against Tamils. Estimates of the civilian dead there range between 300 and 800 as a result of recent government military operations. UNICEF says many infants and children have been injured or killed in these operations.

Human Rights Watch, which condemns the LTTE, has also criticized the Sri Lankan government for mass arrests of civilians fleeing battle areas where the government is attacking LTTE outfits. The organization has called on the U.N. and concerned governments to pressure the Sri Lankan government to spare civilians from harm.

The Sri Lankan government has imposed severe restrictions on the movement of journalists and human rights monitors. This has cast serious doubt on claims by Sri Lanka's military that it has only targeted LTTE fighters in its offensive. □

Harlem meeting says:

‘Hands off Zimbabwe’

A standing-room-only crowd of several hundred attended a Black History Month forum held at the National Black Theater in Harlem Feb. 8 entitled "Zimbabwe: Pan-Africanism or Imperialism." The meeting was organized by the Brooklyn-based December 12th Movement and Friends of Zimbabwe.

The meeting explored the historical and present-day issues facing this once colonized country in southern Africa. British and U.S. imperialism are once again targeting Zimbabwe for defending its sovereignty and especially for redistributing the land to its people. Economic sanctions continue to plague the people of Zimbabwe with dire poverty, malnutrition and erosion of their infrastructure, despite the implementation of a national unity government, set now for Feb. 13.



Forum speakers explained why sanctions are an act of war, defended President Robert Mugabe against racist demonization and linked Zimbabwe with the struggle against wars abroad and with the struggle against war at home.

From left to right the speakers are

Omowale Clay, D 12; Chaka Cousins, All African People's Revolutionary Party; professor Dr. Leonard Jefferies, City College CUNY; Pan-Africanist professor and author, Dr. Molefi Asante; Viola Plummer, D 12; Dr. James McIntosh, Committee to Eliminate Media Offensive to African People; Monica

Moorehead, International Action Center; and attorney Malik Zulu Shabazz, New Black Panther Party. Videotaped remarks were shown of renowned playwright and poet, Amiri Baraka. Workers World will report more on this historic forum in a future issue.

—Monica Moorehead



Free Leonard Peltier!

Feb. 6 was the 33rd anniversary of the arrest of Native political prisoner Leonard Peltier.

Peltier, a participant in the American Indian Movement, was wrongfully convicted in 1976 of the death of two Federal Bureau of Investigation agents in a shoot-out at the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. For 33 years Peltier has languished in several prisons, despite revelations of coerced testimonies, fabricated and suppressed evidence, and federal officials stating that it is unknown who fired the shots or what role Peltier may have played. Peltier, who was incarcerated at the age of 31, is now 64 and suffers from diabetes.

Despite his imprisonment, Peltier has never wavered in the struggle for Native rights, for his own freedom, and for an end to racist oppression and repression at the hands of successive U.S. administrations. In a solidarity statement to fellow political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal this past April, Peltier wrote: “We are the American Indian Movement, we are the Black Panthers, we are MOVE, we are the Viet Cong, we are the Irish Republican Army and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. We are every man, woman and child who desires to see a sunrise in a land of freedom and opportunity, a land of plenty and not hunger, a land of choices without fear, a land of progress without brutality.” (phillyimc.org, April 21)

Peltier’s frame-up mirrors the frame-up of so many other political prisoners—

leaders or participants in struggles for the liberation of their people who are accused of killing police officers or FBI agents, then given unfair trials where evidence is suspect and the cards are stacked against them. Once they have chosen the victim to point the finger at, the agents of the state are relentless in their attempts to keep political prisoners locked up, no matter what evidence surfaces that points to his or her innocence.

Recent attacks on Peltier confirm the ruthlessness of the state. Peltier, who has always been a model prisoner, was recently beaten upon his transfer to Canaan Federal Prison in Pennsylvania—an attack that many suspect was set up by prison officials to disqualify him when he faces a parole board sometime this year. Only after many people protested their outrage over this setup was Peltier returned to the federal Lewisburg Penitentiary.

In a message to newly elected President Barack Obama, 2008 Green Party presidential candidate Cynthia McKinney urged: “Peltier should be released. He has become a global symbol of injustice and prison abuse.”

McKinney concluded: “True and lasting peace will come only with justice. Freeing our political prisoners, including Peltier, Mumia, Sundiata [Acoli], Imam El-Amin, our Puerto Rican political prisoners, and so many more is but a down payment on the path and justice and reconciliation.”

Free Peltier and all political prisoners!

□

What does ‘emergency’ mean?

This letter arrived in response to the article, “Welfare vanishes as poverty soars,” published in the Feb. 12 issue of Workers World.

My daughter, Aurora, lives in Albuquerque, N.M. She has two children, and since her companion lost his job as a chef at Marriot, she/they are fairly destitute. She works on call as a home health care aide.

Aurora was in New York for Christmas and was good enough to spend all of her food stamp allotment on us (turkey for Christmas and trimmings). When she got back to New Mexico, she found that she had missed the deadline for emergency



food stamps—by a day. I said, “How can there be an emergency deadline? If you need food, you need it and your children need it? How can they have you wait? You could starve!”

It was the same thing with TANF [Temporary Assistance to Needy Families]; miss an emergency deadline and wait for two or three weeks for help—the little that you get!

I guess Clinton changed the meaning of a simple word. You would have thought it a non-negotiable word: emergency!

—Donna
Brooklyn, N.Y.



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Kim Jong-Il



Contributions to the struggle for socialism

By Eric Struch

The more a people’s leader is slandered, ridiculed and belittled by the racist capitalist press in this country, the more important it is to look beyond the propaganda to find out why the ruling class considers this leader and what he/she represents such a threat.

Media in the U.S., privately owned—like everything else—by our obscenely wealthy rulers, have presented a profoundly distorted picture of the socialist northern part of Korea and its leader, Kim Jong Il. Racism and personal attacks are the norm and the most outrageous lies are promoted as fact.

The truth is that Kim Jong Il, who is chairperson of the National Defense Commission, general secretary of the Korean Workers Party (WPK) and supreme commander of the Korean People’s Army (KPA), has had a prominent leadership role in the DPRK since the late 1970s.

Juche, the Korean philosophy of self-reliance, was originated by Kim Il Sung—founder of the WPK and the great leader of Korea’s revolution against colonialism and capitalism. Kim Jong Il has continued in the Juche tradition and added to it the policy of Songun, which puts the People’s Army at the center of Korean society. This is what allowed the DPRK to maintain its socialist system, defend the nation and pull through an extremely difficult period during the mid to late 1990s.

That period began with the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the Soviet Union in 1991. This fell as a heavy blow on the DPRK, since nearly all its trade was with the socialist community of nations.

On July 8, 1994, the Korean people suffered the profound loss of Kim Il Sung. After a period of national mourning and before Kim Jong Il was even able to take the reins of power, Korea was hit by devastating record floods in 1995 and 1996 and then suffered years of drought, starting in 1997. This was absolutely catastrophic in a country where only 18 percent of the land is arable.

U.S. imperialism under Bill Clinton attempted to take advantage of the suffering of the Korean people during this difficult period by ratcheting up the military pressure of its more than 30,000 occupying troops in the south and threatening the DPRK with nuclear destruction.

In response, Kim Jong Il strengthened the military capability of the KPA and developed Songun to strengthen the nation ideologically. Rodong Sinmun, in its January 1999 New Year’s editorial, defined Songun as an ideology “in which the People’s Army serves as the main force of revolution and in which the unity of the army and the people helps to safeguard as well as build socialism.” The army not only defended the country against attack—a real threat for Korea, which has been mercilessly invaded in the past by both Japan and the U.S.—but worked alongside civilians on many development projects to repair the damage caused by the floods and drought. The U.S.-backed government in South Korea has outlawed Web sites that promote Songun.

In addition to Songun, the three other mainstays of Kim Jong Il’s politics have been an intransigent opposition to bureaucratic privilege, the development of Juche and moving the struggle for national reunification forward.

Kim Jong Il became known in the late 1960s for his opposition to the use of material incentives to increase production. His belief, which he shared with Ernesto “Che” Guevara, was that this broke down socialist solidarity among workers. In the early 1970s, after being elected to the Central Committee of the WPK, he was responsible for legislation mandating that higher-level bureaucrats spend 20 days a month at regular working-class jobs alongside other workers.

Songun politics rest on the foundation of the Juche idea. The three principles of Juche are independence in politics (chaju), self-sustenance in the economy (charip) and self-defense in national defense (chawi).

Kim Jong Il is responsible for the formulation of the Three Charters for National Reunification—independence, peaceful reunification and national unity. He has made concrete proposals to the South Korean government for a unified democratic federal republic. All this led to the historic breakthrough of the June 2000 inter-Korean summit meeting. The result of the summit was a milestone in the long struggle for reunification: the adoption of the June 15th Joint Declaration. The DPRK saw this as “freeing north-south relations from the long-standing concept of confrontation and turning them into one of reconciliation and cooperation.” It was followed in 2007 by the October 4th Declaration, which reaffirmed the goals of the June 2000 agreement.

Last fall, however, the election of ultrarightist Lee Myung Bak in the U.S.-occupied south was a major setback to the momentum established by the two previous joint declarations. One of the main goals of the DPRK today is to move reunification forward.

Kim Jong Il’s birthday is on Feb. 16. Considering that he has led the KPA and the WPK through the country’s darkest days in the 1990s and preserved socialism, is it any wonder that it will be celebrated all over Korea? □

Israeli crimes in Gaza incite struggle worldwide

By Kathy Durkin

Israel seizes aid ship bound for Gaza

A Lebanese ship carrying 60 tons of humanitarian aid for the besieged people of Gaza was aggressively intercepted and seized on Feb. 5 by the Israeli navy. Called “The Brotherhood Ship,” this unarmed vessel carried medical supplies, food, books, toys and milk for children. The cargo ship was stopped 19 miles off Gaza. On board were human rights activists, religious figures, journalists and crew members.

Al-Jazeera correspondent Salam Khoder reported that the Israeli navy opened fire on the ship. Then soldiers stormed it. Passengers were beaten, then handcuffed and interrogated, and their possessions confiscated. All were arrested. Most were held for a day. Khoder said that she and another woman, Lebanese TV reporter Ugarith Dandash, and Dr. Hani Suleiman, an organizer of the Lebanese aid mission, were beaten. (iht.com)

The ship’s owner, Mohamed Youssef, told Al-Jazeera from Beirut that the navy’s firing damaged the ship. He said, “Contacts with the ship were cut. ... the crew and passengers were beaten savagely.” (latimes.com)

The freighter was forcibly towed to Ashdod, Israel, where it was searched and where it remains. What happened to the aid is unknown. Most passengers and crew have been sent to Lebanon and Syria, but as of Feb. 6 two crew members from India were still in Israeli police custody. Scottish human rights and Free Gaza Movement activist Teresa McDermott is reportedly in Israel’s Ramleh prison. (palsolidarity.org)

Though other humanitarian-aid ships bound for Gaza have been harassed and threatened, this is the first time that Israel has seized a ship, its passengers and crew. Israel is trying to stop solidarity with the Palestinians while its belligerent enforcement of the blockade of Gaza is preventing critical medicine and food from reaching families there.

Scottish students’ solidarity with Palestinians

Strathclyde University students staged a 24-hour sit-in on Feb. 4-5 to demand that the Glasgow school end its ties to Israel. Led by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), more than 40 students, including many Palestinians, occupied the registry hall. The administration then agreed to stop buying water from the Israeli-owned company Eden Springs, to provide some scholarships for Palestinian students, to publicize the Gaza aid appeal and to show solidarity with the University of Gaza. Eden Springs has been the target of a growing boycott campaign by the Scottish PSC for its violations of international and human rights laws. The company makes worldwide profits from selling water it extracts from

Salukia Spring in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, thereby depriving the Syrian population of a vital water supply. Eden Springs Scotland shut its East of Scotland depot after losing hundreds of contracts across Scotland following an Edinburgh University boycott. Lancaster University’s Friends of Palestine Society is pushing for a campuswide boycott there. (scan.lusu.co.uk) Strathclyde activists vow future sit-ins to demand the university sever its ties to the United Kingdom’s BAE Systems, which ships arms to Israel, and more. (Scotsman.com)

Western Australia dockworkers to boycott Israeli ships

On Jan. 27 the Maritime Union of Australia (Western Australia) resolved support for the people of Gaza and condemned Israel’s military assaults on them. The delegates’ assembly endorsed the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign and pledged to fully participate in it. They called on the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and Unions WA to support the BDS and all related actions. They also asked that the Maritime Union of Australia state conference agree to boycott “all Israeli-registered vessels, and all vessels known to be carrying either goods destined for Israel or goods sourced from Israel.” (www.greenleft.org.au) Sydney MUA officials roundly condemned Israel’s massacres in Gaza by signing a petition which was published in the Sydney Morning Herald.

South African dockworkers refuse to unload Israeli goods

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) announced a victory by South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), whose members refused to unload a ship filled with Israeli goods at Durban harbor. This courageous workers’ action is a big boost to the growing international movement challenging Israeli oppression and militarism against the Palestinian people. The action was carried out despite threats to COSATU members and maneuvers to try to circumvent the workers’ protests by the ship’s owner, M. Dizengoff and Co., a shipping agent for Zim Israel Navigation Company. The shipping company had secretly changed the arrival date for the cargo ship Johanna Russ, which docked on Feb. 4, four days earlier than expected. “The vigilant [dock]workers were on guard and immediately they realized that it had docked, then they refused to handle it, despite pressures from management. SATAWU members maintained their refusal to offload

the ship and also attempted to ensure that scab labor would not be used. ... A few hours after berthing ... the Johanna Russ sneaked out of Durban Harbor.” (www.cosatu.org) COSATU members plan to intensify their efforts in support of the Palestinian people’s struggles by strengthening boycotts of Israeli products and institutions, and pushing divestment and sanctions against Israel. COSATU states: “The momentum against apartheid Israel has become an irresistible force. We are proud to stand with the millions around the world who say, ‘Enough is enough.’ They are doing what we asked them to do when we faced the apartheid regime in our own country.” COSATU and the Palestine Solidarity Committee of South Africa stress, “This is just the beginning of a solidarity campaign which will continue until the demands of the Palestinian people have been won.”

BDS movement salutes South African Transport and Allied Workers Union

On Feb. 3 the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee, BNC, warmly saluted SATAWU for not unloading the Israeli ship on Feb. 4: “Coming weeks after the massive Israeli massacre in Gaza, this distinguished expression by SATAWU of effective solidarity with the Palestinian people in general, and with Gaza in particular, sets a historic precedent that reminds us of the first such action during the apartheid era taken by Danish dock workers in 1963, when they decided not to offload ships carrying South African products, triggering a similar boycott in Sweden, England and elsewhere.” (www.bdsmovement.net) They also hailed the decision of the Maritime Union of Australia (Western Australia) to boycott Israeli vessels and Israel-bound cargo and ships, and they recognized the Greek dockworkers who threatened to block a ship carrying weapons to Israel to use against Gaza: “Those actions [and] the SATAWU decision ... will most likely usher in a new, qualitatively advanced phase of BDS that goes well beyond symbolism. We call on dock workers’ unions around the world to endorse similar sanctions against Israeli or Israel-bound cargo. “Support in South Africa for the Palestinian struggle against Israel’s colonial and apartheid policies and its war crimes is reaching new heights, with COSATU, the South African Council of Churches, the Palestine Solidarity Committee, the Young Communist League and many grassroots organizations and networks leading diverse forms of BDS campaigns, informed by the long and ultimately successful struggle of South Africans against apartheid. The Palestinian and global BDS movement against Israel is indebted to the people of South Africa for their inspiring and morale-boosting solidarity.” □

AFGHANISTAN

Supply-route losses hamper NATO occupation

By G. Dunkel

The U.S. and its NATO allies face an extremely difficult challenge in Afghanistan. How can they supply the troops they have there? More troops—the U.S. has floated the idea of an additional 30,000 to 40,000—will mean a bigger challenge. Most of the U.S. and NATO supplies come from Pakistan through the Khyber Pass. This is 80 percent of what they use—everything except weapons and ammunition, which come by air. (Christian Science Monitor, Feb. 4). There is growing resistance in Pakistan to supporting the U.S., and the Afghan resistance has made this treacherous mountain pass a priority target. Last week, according to the Daily Times of Pakistan, they blew up “a British-era iron bridge near Ali Masjid in Khyber Agency.” The blast was powerful enough to break windows in nearby buildings, but two additions bombs didn’t go off. If they had, the Pakistani authorities would

have had a very difficult time replacing a completely destroyed bridge, rather than repairing it. The day the bomb went off in the Khyber Pass, the Kyrgyz president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, announced that Kyrgyzstan would no longer allow the U.S. to use its airbase at Manas, which has been a convenient staging ground for U.S. air shipments destined for northern Afghanistan. While the U.S. and British press made a big deal of the \$2.15 billion aid package that Kyrgyzstan got from Russia, the English-language Russian TV channel RT in a Feb. 7 report concentrated on the rape charges against a U.S. airman, who had diplomatic immunity. RT also interviewed Kyrgyz farmers living near the base who were upset with U.S. planes dumping fuel before they land. The U.S. currently has permission to move nonlethal supplies through Kyrgyzstan territory, which involves landing them in the Ukraine then transporting the supplies most of the way to Manas by train. The U.S. also uses the Soviet-built



An overturned truck lies on a destroyed bridge in the Khyber area near Peshawar, Pakistan.

airport at Manas for air cargo. However, given the tense state of relations between the U.S. and Russia, the Pentagon planners want to come up with a logistical scheme that avoids Russia, and of course Pakistan. One route currently under active consideration starts on Georgia’s Black Sea coast and heads across the Caucasus by rail to Azerbaijan, where supplies would be loaded onto ships to cross the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan. Then they’d be loaded

back onto trains. Supplies would go via rail to Termez in Uzbekistan. While this cumbersome and obviously expensive possible supply route avoids Russia, any number of political changes and permutations could make it untenable, not to mention expensive. Given the current economic crisis, the expense of this operation is the more important factor. The Sunday Times of London (Feb. 8) reported that U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has postponed deciding whether to send an additional 17,000 troops after he couldn’t answer some of President Barack Obama’s questions about an exit strategy. The U.S. and its imperialist allies are finding it more and more difficult to overcome the resistance to their domination and occupation in Central Asia, or even to reach a satisfactory stalemate. □

El cruel legado de Bill Clinton

Asistencia pública se desvanece mientras profundiza la pobreza

Por Fred Goldstein

Mientras millones de personas pierden sus hogares y sus empleos, los gobiernos estatales están reduciendo la mísera asistencia disponible a l@s pobres y desemplead@s.

Unos 2,6 millones de empleos se perdieron en el 2008. El anuncio de 500.000 a 600.000 despidos en enero se espera pronto y cientos de miles de recortes de empleo más ya están programados para febrero.

Sin embargo, el número de personas que reciben asistencia en efectivo durante esta crisis permanece “al nivel, o cerca del nivel más bajo en 40 años.” En un artículo publicado el 2 de febrero por el diario The New York Times se reportaron estas nefastas cifras.

De hecho, dieciocho estados recortaron sus listas de asistencia pública en medio de esta crisis. Michigan, uno de los dos estados con una cifra oficial de desempleo de más del 9 por ciento, recortó su lista de asistencia pública en un 13 por ciento. De los 12 estados donde el desempleo ha subido más rápidamente, ocho de éstos han recortado sus listas o las han dejado igual.

De los 10 estados con las tasas más altas de pobreza infantil, ocho mantuvieron el mismo nivel de casos o redujeron aún más las listas. Cinco estados tuvieron reducciones de doble dígito en las listas de asistencia pública, incluyendo a Texas, que terminó la asistencia pública a 15 por ciento de l@s recipientes.

Estos recortes, dirigidos primordialmente contra las mujeres, llegan en un momento cuando el desempleo entre las mujeres sin educación de escuela superior y en edades entre los 20 y 24 años, subió al 23,9 por ciento, del 17,9 por ciento hace un año. Celia Hagert del Centro para la Política Pública en Austin, Texas, dijo al diario The New York Times, “Estamos simplemente sacando a las familias del programa.”

Rhode Island cerró los casos de 2.200 niñ@s porque sus familias ya habían esta-

do en las listas de asistencia pública más tiempo del permitido de sesenta meses durante la vida del/la beneficiado/a.

Bill Clinton destruyó la asistencia pública, forzando a millones de personas a la pobreza

El programa bajo el cual la asistencia pública se distribuye se llama Asistencia Temporal para Familias Necesitadas (TANF, siglas en inglés). Este draconiano programa fue instalado en el año 1996 durante la administración de Clinton. Este reemplazó un programa de hacía 60 años que se inició bajo las políticas del Nuevo Trato, [programas de rehabilitación económica durante los años 1933 a 1939 por el entonces Presidente Franklin D. Roosevelt.] titulado Ayuda a las Familias con Niñ@s Dependientes (AFDC, siglas en inglés).

Bill Clinton llegó a la presidencia comprometiendo a “terminar con la asistencia pública que conocemos.” Eso fue una forma de decir “Vamos a destruir la asistencia pública.” Y eso fue lo que Clinton hizo, en un pacto con un congreso bajo el control republicano encabezado por el derechista y reaccionario Newt Gingrich. Después de firmar el proyecto y convertirlo en ley, Clinton se jactó diciendo que “la era del gran gobierno había terminado.”

Por supuesto que Clinton no se refería al “gran gobierno” del Pentágono, el FBI, la CIA, etc. Lo que él hizo fue algo que la clase gobernante buscaba desde hace mucho tiempo: permitirles tomar el dinero que se le había dado a las madres solteras con niñ@s que fueron abandonadas por el capitalismo y dejadas solas a la deriva en el mar de su pobreza. Ellos además querían forzar a millones de mujeres empobrecidas fuera de las listas de asistencia para así crear una vasta adición explotable a la fuerza laboral.

Bajo el programa AFDC, las mujeres con hij@s que llenaron las condiciones de tener poco o ningún ingreso, igual que hombres con poco o ningún ingreso que no pudieran tener empleo, tenían el derecho

de solicitar la ayuda. La asistencia en efectivo era mínima y el proceso de solicitar difícil y degradante. Sometiéndose a las hostigantes e invasivas inspecciones mensuales para retener los beneficios constituían una práctica más denigrante aún. Puesto que los beneficios eran primordialmente para madres solteras, las mujeres tenían que ocultar cualquier relación con un hombre para mantener los ínfimos pagos recibidos del estado capitalista.

Sin embargo, la AFDC era vital para la existencia de millones de mujeres y sus hij@s. Debido a generaciones de discriminación racista, ellas eran desproporcionalmente africana-americanas y latinas, pero millones de familias blancas pobres también se beneficiaron. Era un apoyo básico de subsistencia. Además estaba garantizado por ley a cualquiera que calificara.

Bajo la administración Clinton, el derecho a la asistencia pública llegó a un cruel final. TANF dio subvenciones en bloque en cantidades fijas a los estados para que hicieran prácticamente lo que quisieran. Los estados tuvieron que remover a millones de mujeres pobres de sus listas en los infames programas “de la asistencia al trabajo”. Muchos gobernantes reaccionarios disfrutaban al ver la posibilidad de mandar a estas pobres mujeres a la fuerza laboral, las cuales estaban usualmente forzadas a tomar un trabajo tedioso y mal pagado en el sector público o privado.

L@s trabajador@s tenían que laborar una semana en estos trabajos mal pagados para ganar una asistencia disminuida y sólo podían obtener esta ayuda durante cinco años durante toda su vida. Las mujeres que trataban de ir a la escuela para aprender una destreza eran forzadas a escoger entre recibir los beneficios o ir a la escuela si su educación las forzaba a reducir las horas de trabajo.

La ley era tan draconiana que el secretario asistente de salud y servicios humanos, Peter Edelman, renunció en protesta y escribió una larga acusación en la edición de marzo de 1997 del Atlantic Monthly titulada “Lo Peor que Hizo Clinton.”

En ese tiempo este autor escribió una carta abierta a Edelman en la edición del periódico Workers World/Mundo Obrero del 27 de marzo de 1997 titulada “Echemos abajo la Ley de Asistencia Pública.” (workers.org/ww/1997/edelman.html).

Nuestra carta decía en parte: “Nos inclinamos a estar de acuerdo con el título del artículo...[a pesar de que Clinton] a hecho muchas cosas terribles. Estas cosas incluyen la Ley del Crimen que financia prisiones, la policía, y la pena capital; la Ley Antiterrorista que aumentó el poder represivo del FBI y terminó con el derecho del Habeas Corpus; la extensión del bloqueo criminal a Cuba al firmar el Acta Helms-Burton; la continuación de las san-

ciones criminales contra Irak, y muchas otras medidas reaccionarias.

La carta citó cómo Edelman mostró que “un total de 11 millones de familias, 10 por ciento de todas las familias estadounidenses — perderían sus ingresos bajo esta ley. Esto incluía más de 8 millones de familias con hij@s, muchas de las familias que trabajaban afectadas por recortes de los cupones de alimentos, que resultaban en un promedio de \$1.300 por cada familia.”

“Usted muestra,” continuó la carta, “que casi 800.000 inmigrantes perderán sus beneficios de Ingreso de Seguridad Suplementaria (SSI por las siglas en inglés) y sus cupones de alimentos que suman \$24 mil millones en seis años. Y que 100.000 a 200.000 niñ@s con discapacidades, la mayoría de ell@s con múltiples discapacidades, perderán el SSI”.

En ese entonces, Edelman dijo, “Éste no es una ley de asistencia social... sino recortes” para familias pobres y trabajadoras. La carta abierta concluyó con un llamado a enfocar la culpa hacia el Pentágono, los banqueros y los capitalistas y para convocar un movimiento para derrocar esta ley.

Se cayó el otro zapato

Más importante aún, la ley nueva estableció una cantidad fija para la totalidad de la asistencia social nacional, sin importar cuántas personas necesitaran asistencia. Esto no sólo era algo totalmente cruel, altamente racista e injusto en ese tiempo, sino que inevitablemente resultaría en un desastre para tod@s l@s trabajador@s. El minuto en que surgiera una crisis económica y a l@s trabajador@s se les acabaran los beneficios por desempleo, las masas de desemplead@s caerían en la más terrible pobreza y sufrimiento.

Hoy en día el país está en medio de una crisis económica enorme y creciente que está incluyendo a más y más sectores de la clase trabajadora. Pero por la destrucción de Clinton de los programas de asistencia social, con el cambio de AFDC a TANF, los números de casos que necesitan asistencia social han caído cada año desde el 1994. El nivel actual de 4,1 millones no ha sido visto desde 1964. El hecho es que los beneficios en efectivo pagados bajo el TANF desde octubre del 2008, han sido sólo un 30 por ciento de los beneficios que se hubieran pagado bajo la AFDC.

El grupo de Clinton se ha movido en su mayor parte a la administración presente, incluyendo a Hillary Rodham Clinton y Rahm Emanuel, entre otros. Éste es el grupo que ayudó a Clinton y Gingrich a empuñar el hacha que cayó encima de l@s trabajador@s y oprimid@s y que ahora está intensificando el sufrimiento.

El único camino para darle marcha atrás a este ataque devastador contra l@s trabajador@s y l@s oprimid@s, es movilizar una campaña masiva para luchar que exija no solamente beneficios mínimos, sino la total garantía de un trabajo a salarios justos con beneficios o ingresos que den lo suficiente para vivir. Éste debe ser el verdadero derecho de la clase trabajadora multinacional. □



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Libertad para los cinco
compatriotas cubanos que
defendieron a su país del terrorismo
y que ahora están presos en EE.UU.
por evitar muertes en la isla